

## **Testimony Concerning HB 5600**

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Kathleen Cojanu, Oakland County Youth and Family Caseworker (Retired)

DATE: September 27, 2012

I am writing in support of HB 5600

I have previously been employed as a Youth and Family Caseworker at the Oakland County Family Court from April, 1976 through September, 2010. During the course of my employment I have seen many changes in the way juveniles are handled by the judicial system. Beginning in the 1990's the system began to treat juveniles more as it treated adults. It became easier to waive juveniles to the adult system and to sentence them as adults. For the first time, juvenile court records became permanent. Perhaps most damaging of all, juvenile records became public.

We now know a great deal more about how the adolescent brain functions (or doesn't) and we have a much clearer understanding of adolescent development. What we now know is that adolescents are not like adults. Much of their impulsivity and poor judgment results from their adolescent biology and brain function. Their offenses may look like adult offenses but they are not the same. Now that all of the scientific evidence is in it is time to make changes in juvenile justice policy that reflect what we know. A permanent public record of juvenile offenses makes it difficult to find employment, attend college and obtain other training and licensing. It puts up barriers where none need exist. We know that very few juvenile offenders go on to commit crimes as adults. They simply grow up.

HB 5600 would allow more juveniles to have their records set aside. It gives the juvenile a process by which the Court may consider having the record set aside. The juvenile must still demonstrate that he/she has had no further offenses and convince the Court that their behavior is consistent with the public welfare. The State Police would continue to have a record of the offense for law enforcement and court purposes but the juvenile would be able to move on without the stigma that comes with a public criminal record. The stated goal of the Juvenile System has always been rehabilitation. Let's let rehabilitated juveniles move on.